



Debate Procedures

Debate begins with the assumption that the debater has already found a solution or approach to a specific issue. The intent of the debater is to persuade others that his or her solution or approach is the proper one.

Debate can be an effective device for encouraging students to clearly and logically formulate arguments based on evidence. Debate teaches a means to adequately support a position on an issue. It also develops a sense of efficacy and confidence in a person's ability to sway public opinion or to change public policy.

1. **Clarify the topic:** Help students understand the topic of the debate. Formulate the topic into a resolution (resolutions always ask for a change from the status quo, e.g. Resolved, that capital punishment should be found unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.)
2. **Assign roles:** Select students to take part in the debate. Divide them into two teams, one in support of the resolution the other opposing it. Make certain that those participating in the debate are familiar with the procedures to be followed during the debate. Select a moderator and a timekeeper.
3. **Prepare presentations:** Allow sufficient time for students to prepare their "constructive arguments" (arguments based on three to five major points logically developed and substantiated by factual evidence in support of a particular position.) Help students see the dimensions of the problem and develop clear, logical arguments supported by evidence on the position they defend in the debate. Also, ask them to anticipate the views of the other side in preparation for their "rebuttal arguments."

Help students gain an understanding of some of the implicit values in debate such as learning to make convincing arguments frame of reference, as might be the case if one is debating a position that does not correspond with one's own beliefs. This furthers development of students' abilities to understand and respect the right of individuals to hold opinions and beliefs that are different from their own.

4. **Arrange the classroom:** The moderator and debaters are seated at the front of the audience, usually with the team in opposition to the resolution to the left of the moderator.
5. **Conduct the debate:** The form of debate described here is widely used, but it is rather formalized. You may wish to make procedures less formal or use some other form of debate.
 - a. The moderator briefly introduces the subject and the resolution to be debated and establishes the time limits to be observed by the speakers.
 - b. The moderator introduces the first speaker from the affirmative team and asks the speaker to present his or her constructive argument. The order in which constructive arguments will be given by each member of the team should be

determined in advance of the debate. The timekeeper will inform the speaker when the time limit has been reached.

- c. The moderator introduces the first speaker from the team in opposition to the resolution and asks the speaker to present his or her constructive argument.
- d. The moderator next introduces the second speaker from the affirmative team. This procedure is alternated until each debater on both affirmative and opposition teams has given a constructive argument.
- e. Rebuttal arguments follow the constructive arguments. At this time each debater is given the opportunity to weaken the position of the opponents by attacking their position and by answering attacks that have been made on his or her position. No new issues may be introduced during rebuttal arguments. Rebuttal arguments always begin with the team in opposition to the resolution. Again follow the same alternating procedures used during constructive arguments.
- f. At the conclusion of the debate, the moderator makes a few concluding remarks and the debate is ended.

6. **Debrief the activity:** You may wish to evaluate the success of the debating teams by informally polling the class to determine how many people agree with the team in support of the resolution and how many agree with the team in opposition to the resolution. You may then ask class member to explain whether their own positions were strengthened or changed as a result of hearing the debate and why. Also ask students to evaluate their experience with the debate process itself. Conclude the debriefing by having students discuss the effectiveness of this activity as a tool for learning, including how well they performed their role in it.